

Results of the 'Online Tool Use Survey' undertaken by the JISC funded SPIRE project

Licence	1
General Levels of Usage	3
Types of Usage.....	4
Overall engagement	5
Institutional Trends	6
Overall Engagement with Institutional Services.....	7
Lurking	7
Tutors, Teachers and Students	8
Level of Educational Qualification.....	9

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The survey was designed in October – November 06 and opened on the 1st of December. The survey was closed on the 16th of February 2007. During this period the survey was completed by 1369 respondents.¹ It was released to the students on the suite of online short courses provided by the University of Oxford and was advertised on the University of Oxford's online short courses page² which promotes all of the online distance courses offered by the university. This page receives a lot of traffic and around 90% of respondents came to the survey via this route.

The link from this webpage provided a wide range of respondents across a large demographic. It should be taken into account however that the majority of respondents probably had some interest in leaning online to have initially discovered the page.

A second version of the survey was sent to all of the academics that teach on the weekly classes programmes at the department for continuing education at the university of Oxford. This version of the survey asked a number of more focused questions about the discipline and level of teaching the respondent undertook. The weekly class tutors were chosen as a useful group of as they represent a range of institutions and states of academic employment. They are not a homogeneous group other than the fact they teach at a tertiary level. This version of the survey received 46 responses.

There are a number of weaknesses with the format of the survey. In hindsight it would have been useful to have included grouping services such as Yahoo! and Google groups as their functionality is similar to LionShare but without the peer-to-peer aspect. It would also have been useful to have included a section on aggregation services and popular 'mash-ups'. Some of the services are referred to using specific examples such as Flickr and Wikipedia, whereas other services were referred to as a general type such as blogs and wikis. This means that care should be taken when comparing the survey results for general levels of popularity.

This document deliberately contains very little analysis of the data as I'm interested to hear what other interpret from the charts.

The first two figures below show general levels and types of usage. They are best viewed in tandem.

¹To view a summary version of the complete main survey results please see:
<http://www.surveymonkey.com/DisplaySummary.asp?SID=2799289&U=279928923467>

² <http://onlinecourses.conted.ox.ac.uk/>

General Levels of Usage

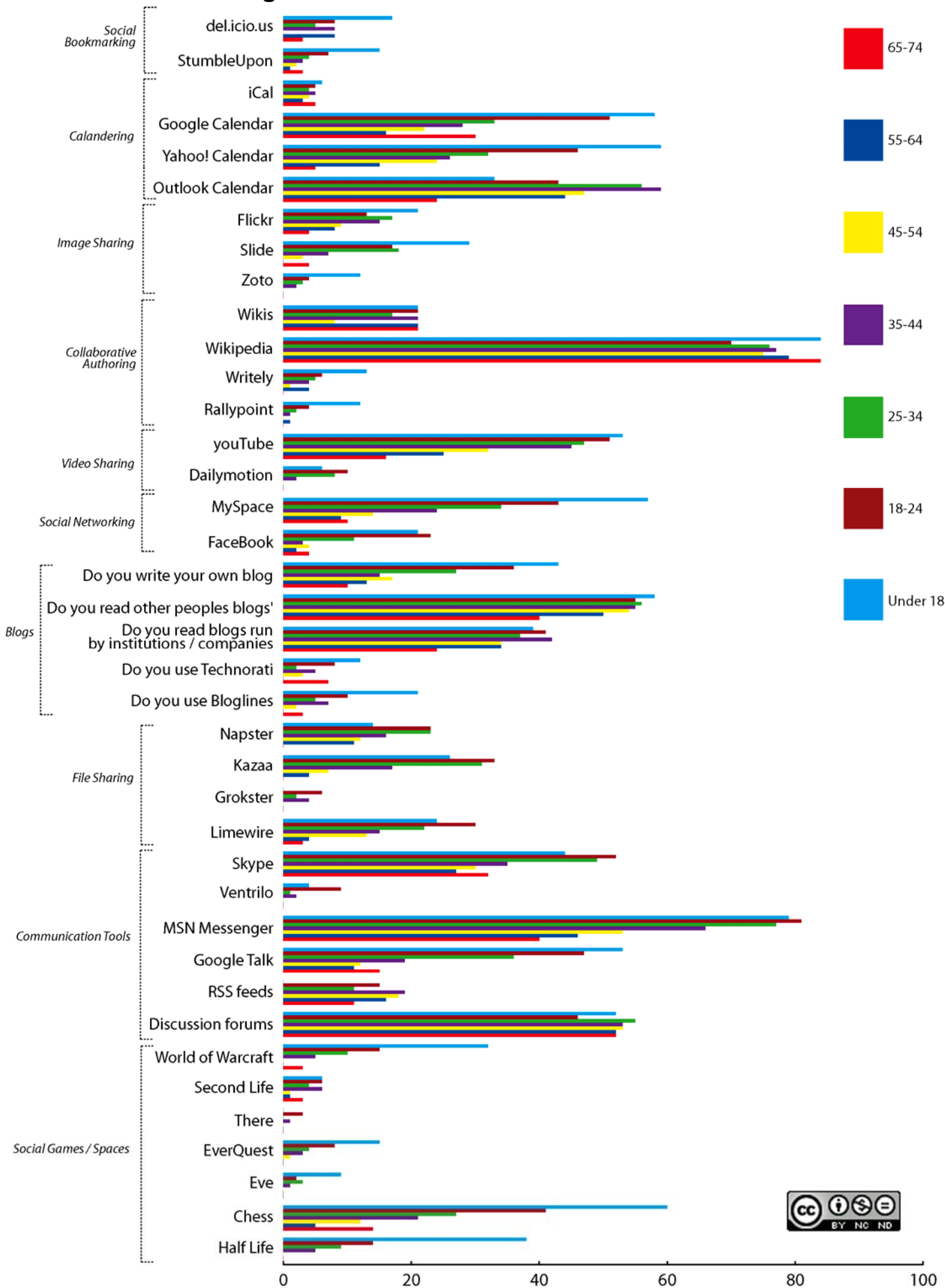


Figure 1: Percentage usage of services across age bands (Circa 1050 responses to each service.)



Types of Usage

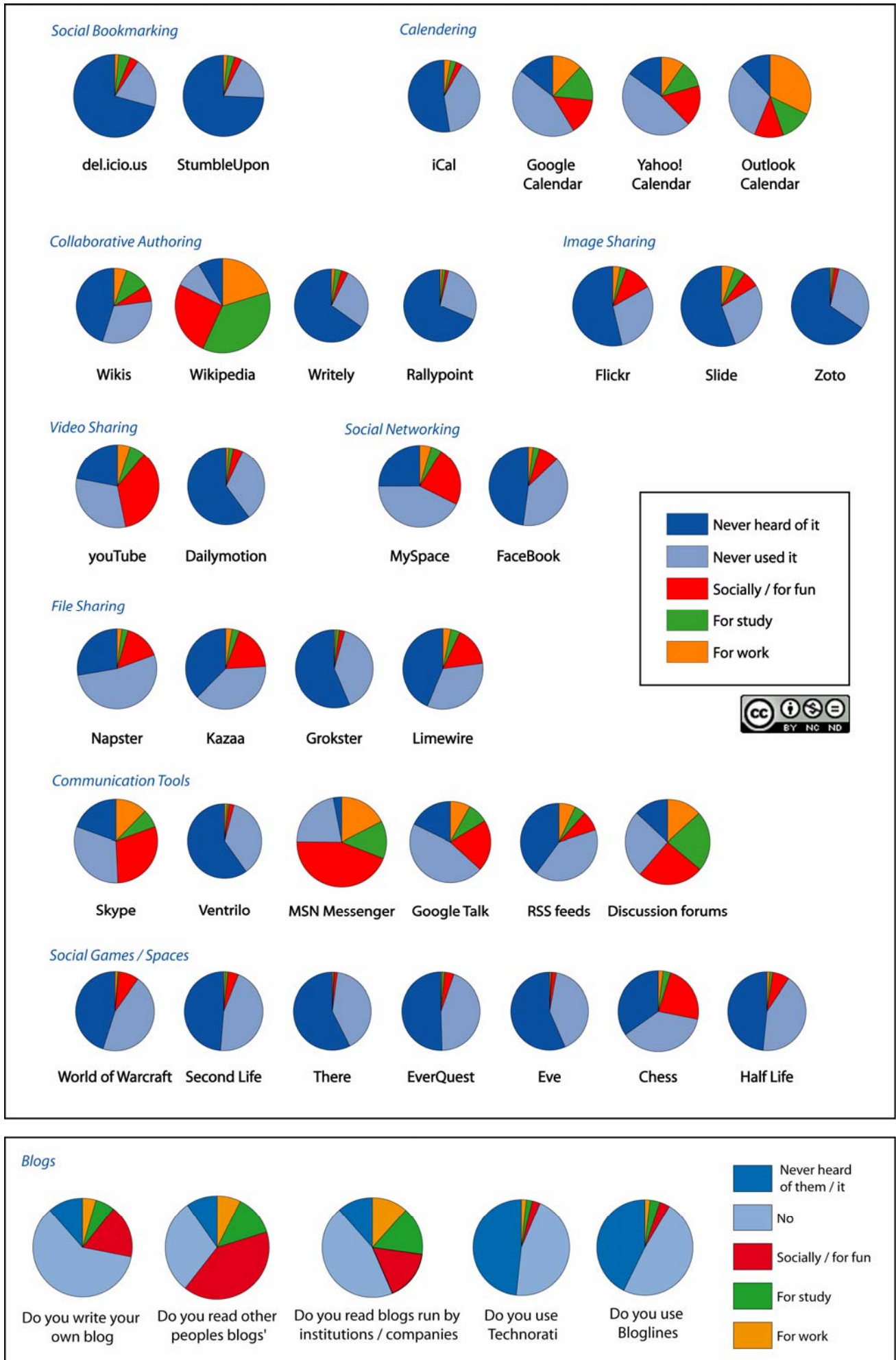


Figure 2: Proportion of usage type

Respondents were asked the following questions about each of the tools / services above:

'Do you use this tool / service:'

- For work
- For study
- Socially / For fun
- Never used it
- Never heard of it

Respondents could check more than one answer. Figure 1 was created by adding together responses to 'Never heard of it' and 'Never used it' and subtracting this sum from the total respondents to that question. This was then turned into a usage percentage.

This method does contain some mathematical flaws³ but these are limited in their effect in a sample of circa 1300. Figure 1 should be used as evidence for general trends and cannot be relied on for accurate cross service comparison. For example the survey did not ask if respondents used the service regularly. It is possible that the apparent high engagement of the under 18 bracket is because they are more likely to 'brush past' a service when surfing but not necessarily use that service more than a couple of times. Nevertheless it is clear that the under 18 group do generally use these types of services the most.

Figure 2 is a simple representation of the proportion of usage type. It is worth remembering that many respondents will have checked more than one usage type for any single service.

Overall engagement

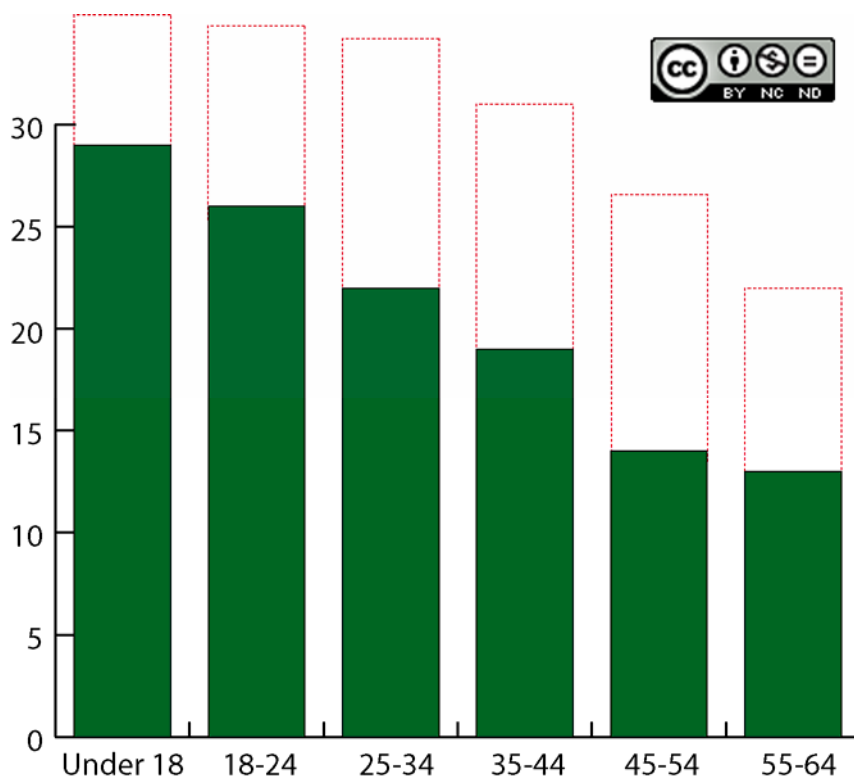


Figure 3: Overall percentage usage of tools / services across age

The chart above shows the survey results in green and a prediction of what the results of a similar survey might look like in 2-3 years time. The actual increase in volume of usage is not being predicted here. The flattening of the drop-off between 18 and 34 is the important aspect to consider. It is likely that the take-up among the young will remain strong and will ripple through as individuals move through the age groups.

³ The main one being generated by respondents who check multiple answers against each service. This option was given to allow the collection of useful data on the manner in which services were used: socially, for work, for study.

Institutional Trends

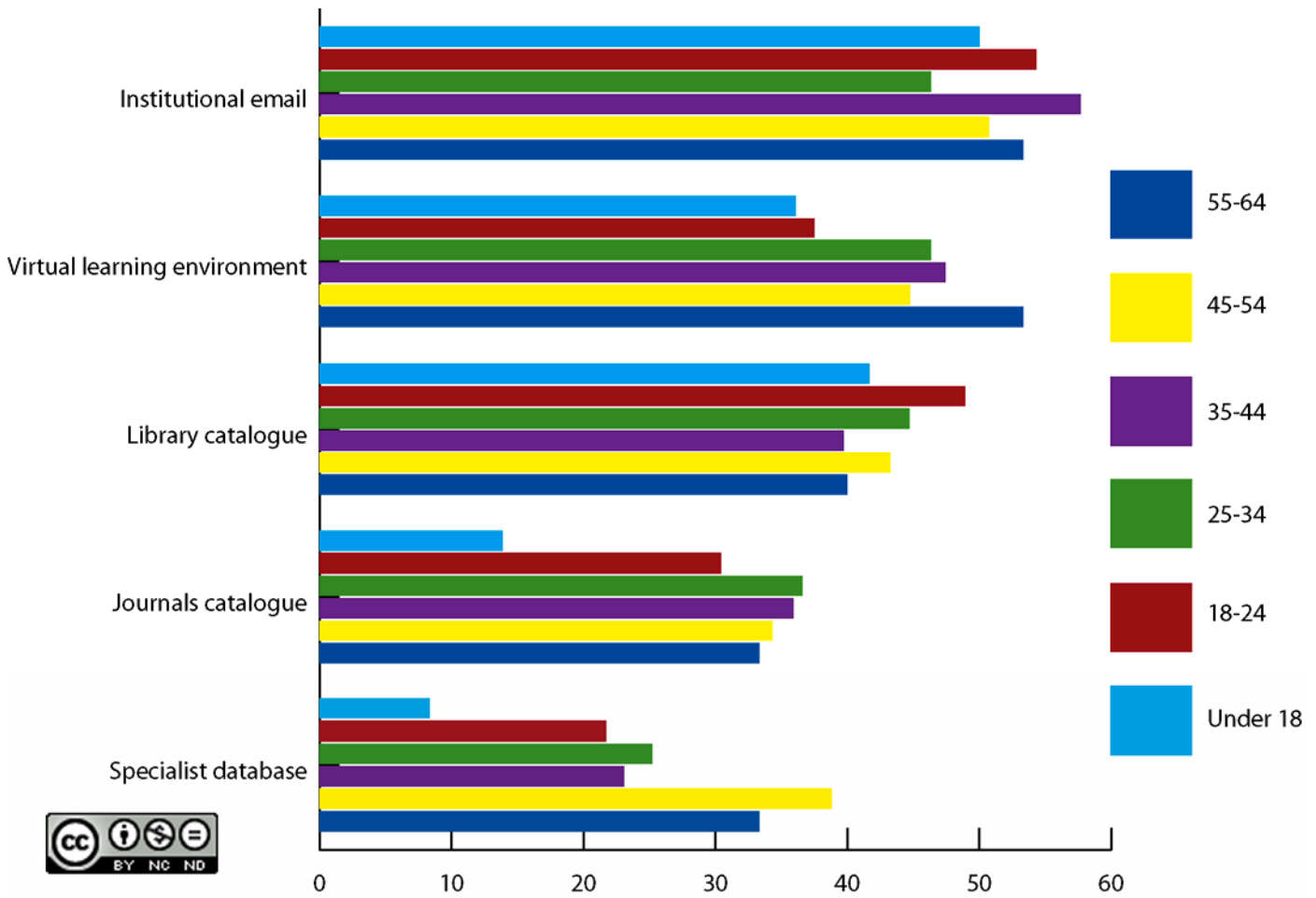


Figure 4: Percentage usage trends for institutional services across age

The above chart is a useful for comparison with the use of the web 2.0 related services. The question was simply: 'Which of these online tools, that may be provided by your educational institution, do you regularly use?' rather than the more complex format used for the web 2.0 related services which asked what respondents used the tool for. This means that the above figure can't be used as a volume of use indicator for some sort of popularity comparison with figure 1. The chart only shows general trends. To clarify this see the table below which shows a small selection of numerical responses.

Service	Regularly Use	For Work	For Study	For Fun / Socially	Never Used It	Never Heard Of It	Total Numerical Usage Response for the Service
Institutional email	301						301
Institutional VLE	236						236
Wikipedia		310	556	389	144	126	1255
Google Calendar		133	161	159	474	150	453
Flickr		32	32	126	318	518	190

Any numerical comparisons are further complicated because the web 2.0 type services section of the survey allowed respondents to check multiple boxes. For example in the case of Wikipedia there were 1076 total responses but 1525 boxes checked, indicating that many people use Wikipedia for a number of reasons. It is also difficult to ascertain how many respondents checked both 'Never used it' and 'Never heard of it'.

All the institutional services inherently have lower response rates because not all of the respondents to the survey will have been attached to an education institutional at the time.

Overall Engagement with Institutional Services

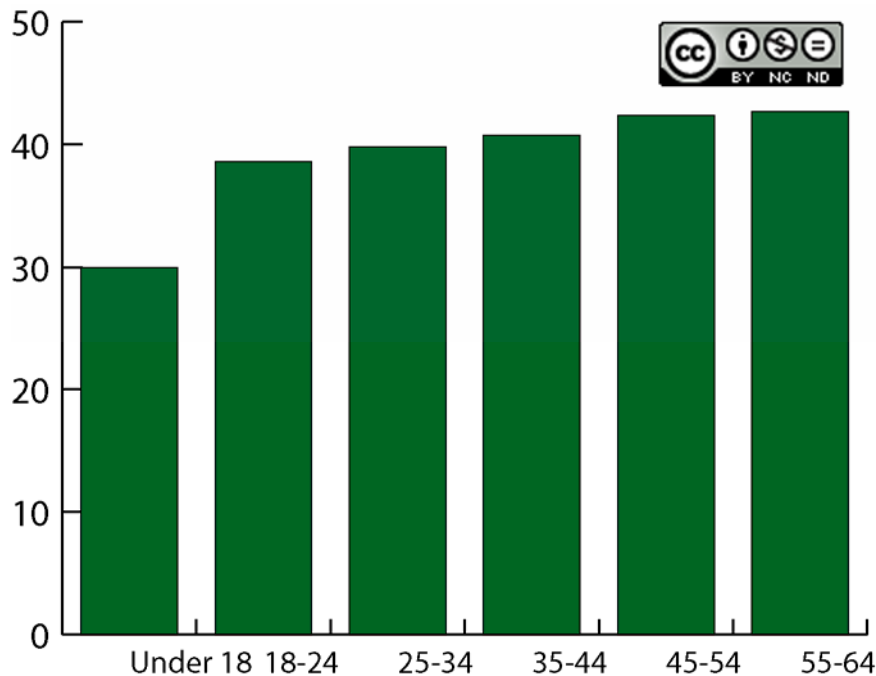


Figure 5: Overall percentage usage trends of institutional services across age

Lurking

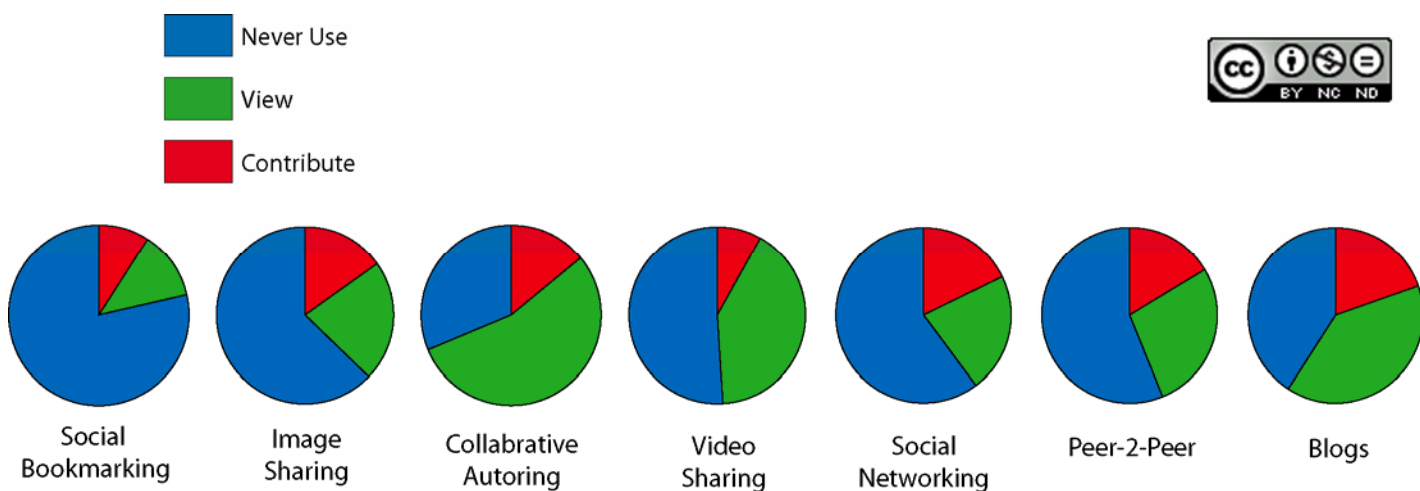


Figure 6: Ratios of contribution to viewing for groups of services

Respondents were asked if they contributed to each group of tool or simply viewed the material offered. This was an attempt to find out the ratio of contribution to 'lurking'. The fact that this question was only asked after groups of services and not after individual services produced what seem to be unreliable results. Also, the concept of contribution is subjective. Recent research in this area distinguishes between 'comments' and 'content creation'.

"It's an emerging rule of thumb that suggests that if you get a group of 100 people online then one will create content, 10 will "interact" with it (commenting or offering improvements) and the other 89 will just view it. It's a meme that emerges strongly in statistics from YouTube, which in just 18 months has gone from zero to 60% of all online video viewing." *Guardian Online July 20, 2006.*

The survey results show a much higher level of contribution than this, with 20% of those who use mySpace and youTube contributing in some form. This could be indicative of a general increase in this area but is probably an effect of this aspect of the survey being too simplistic. This area requires more research especially into what motivates individuals to comment or create. The follow up email interviews to the survey were designed to gain an insight into this issue but are not very comprehensive.

Tutors, Teachers and Students

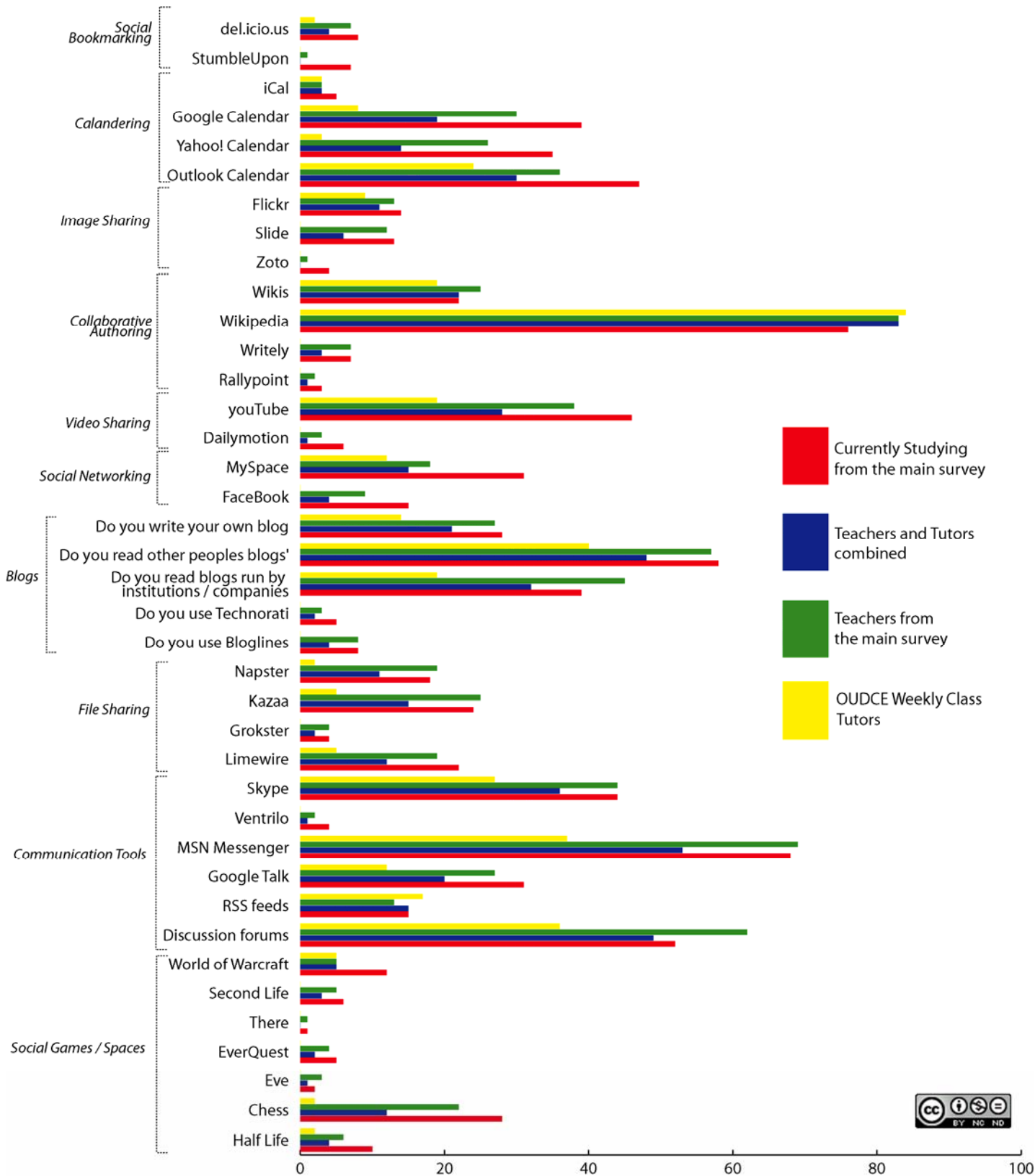


Figure 7: Percentage usage of services showing a comparison between tutor, teacher and student usage.



Level of Educational Qualification

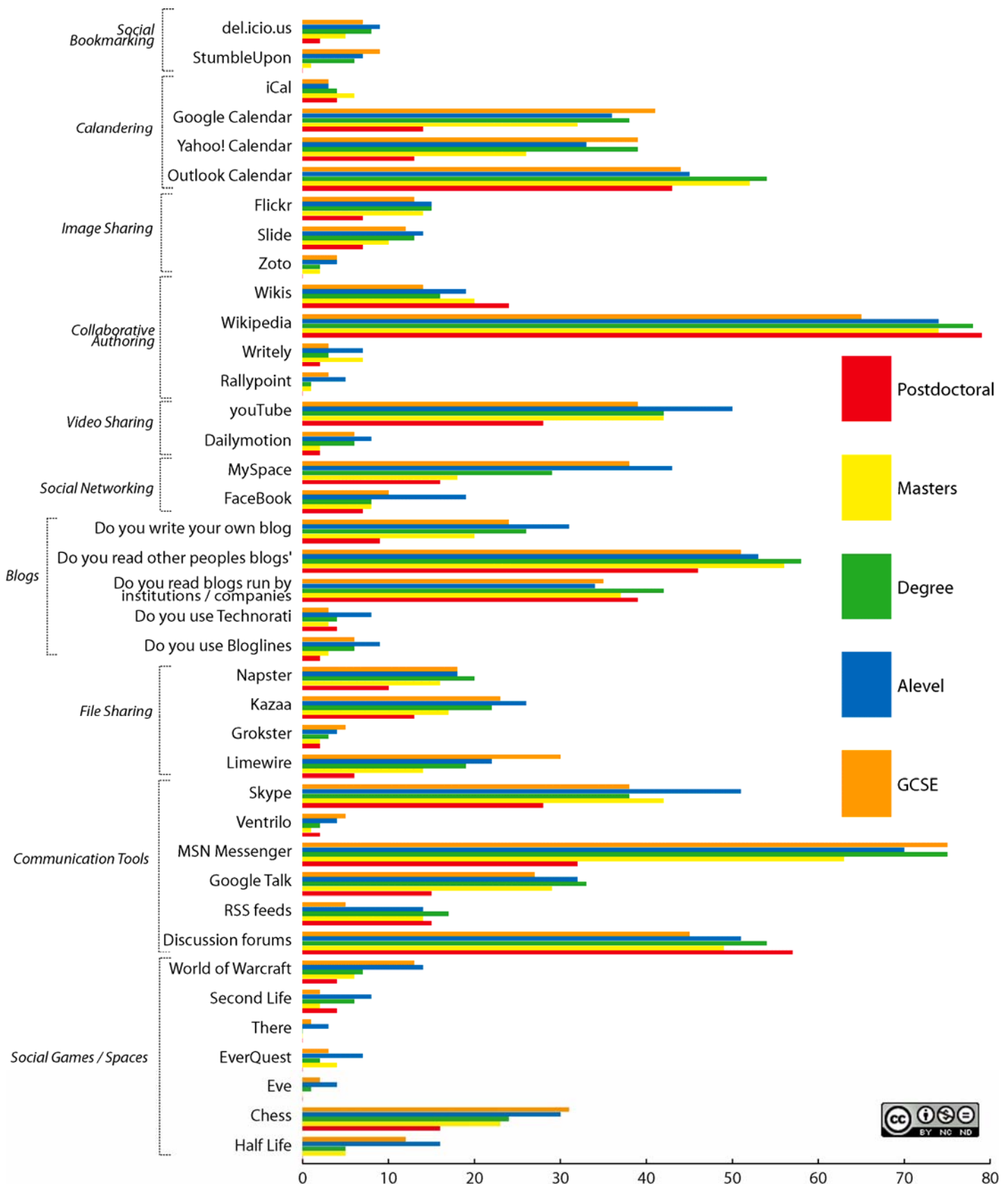


Figure 8: Percentage usage of services based on highest educational qualification (main survey).

The 'OUDCE Weekly Class Tutors' results in figure 7 come from the slightly modified version of the survey promoted to Oxford University Department for Continuing Education (OUDCE) tutors who teach on the weekly classes which are at undergraduate level one and open to all. As mentioned before the 46 respondents to this version of the survey represent a wide range of disciplines; theology, physics, philosophy, neuroscience, town planning, Spanish etc. Of those whose work involved online collaboration 54% said this was only by email.



The green bars in figure 7 are respondents from the main survey whose profession was marked as 'Teacher'. This category will represent a wide range of roles across the education spectrum in both level and style. It is included to act as a comparison with the HE level tutors of OUDCE.

It is of course possible to be represented in both the teaching and studying categories. The open nature of this survey means that no category has clearly defined edges.